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SUBJECT: HEAD OF DUBAI WOMEN'S SHELTER NOT INTIMIDATED BY CRITICS

REF: A) 05 DUBAI 6033; B) 05 DUBAI 6399

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Sharla Musabih, head of an independent women's shelter in Dubai, dismissed recent public criticism of her shelter by a prominent Sunni cleric, saying it was not a threat to her operation. She said she was trying to schedule a meeting with him to discuss the matter further. The Dubai Police and the Dubai Naturalization and Residence Department continue to support Musabih's shelter, but the Dubai Department of Islamic Affairs has requested she register with them or cease operations. End summary

2. (SBU) Sharla Musabih, founder and head of an independent women's shelter in Dubai, met with PolEconoff on March 8 to discuss an article about her operation in the previous day's edition of "7 Days," an English language daily from Dubai. In the article, Sheikh Ahmad Al Kubaisi, a prominent Iraqi Sunni scholar and TV commentator who lives in Dubai, accused Musabih of encouraging women to rebel against their husbands. "If every woman hit by her husband is encouraged to rebel, the sanctity of marriage would disappear from society," Al Kubaisi told the media. Musabih told poloff she would not be intimidated by Kubaisi and in fact was trying to schedule a meeting with him to discuss his views and explain the role her shelter plays in Dubai. It was her opinion that such public attacks only served to increase her support from the government and the progressive elements of society.

3. (U) As reported Ref A, both the Dubai Police and the Dubai Naturalization and Residence Department (DNRD) provide some funding for Musabih's shelter, and they (like the Consulate) continue to refer abused women to the shelter. The commander of the Dubai Police and the head of DNRD recognized Musabih and her work in a December 2005 ceremony (reftel B). (Note: An earlier article, in the Arabic daily Al Bayan, reported falsely that Musabih was funded by the USG.)

4. (SBU) Musabih's shelter has never been licensed, though she has told us she has applied for a license. Musabih said that the Dubai Department of Islamic Affairs (DDIA) had recently sent her a letter requesting she cease operation of the shelter until she registered with DDIA. Musabih said that she intended to meet with the DDIA in the near future.

Comment

5. (SBU) Musabih, an American who is married to a UAE national, views herself -- accurately in our assessment -- as a pioneer in social issues in the UAE. She seems to enjoy being the center of controversy, and is frequently mentioned in the press and on local radio. While her confrontational manner is perceived by some to be jarring in the local context, no one else in Dubai (or the UAE) is consistently providing the important social services she offers, free of charge, to women and children who are victims of abuse.

DAVIS